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ABSTRACT

The objective of the Gulfport Summer School project was to improve the teaching techniques in the English program so that unmotivated and underachieving students could experience some success. Students were grouped in English classes according to their spelling and language scores on the Stanford Achievement Test, Form X, in classes of from 10 to 12 and into four reading levels on the basis of tests scores on the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test. Participating teachers were chosen for their ability to deal with students from a low socio-economic level. Results of the project indicated that the combination of small classes, material geared to the interests and abilities of the students, and an atmosphere which encouraged participation and individual progress had produced improvement in language skills. The statistics based on the X & W forms of the SAT scores of the random pilot group are as follows: Spelling +1 Month; Language +6.5 months; Overall +4.5 months. A control group receiving traditional instruction showed the following results: Spelling +0; Language +5.6 months; Overall +2.8 months. The teachers concluded that a curriculum of this sort should not begin unless provisions are made to continue it for several years and they recommended various ways to set up the program and to carry it out. (Author/AL)

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GULFPORT ENGLISH PROJECT

A PILOT STUDY
ON
AN EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM

GULFPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Gulfport, Mississippi

June-August, 1970

CS 200 183

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An Individualized, Non-graded Pilot Study
In
English for the Under-achiever

By

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A Report of a Ten Weeks Program of Study
In The
Summer School Program
Of The
East Junior High School
Mr. Robert Smith, Principal

June 8 - August 14, 1970

Mr. W. L. Rigby, Superintendent
Gulfport Public Schools
Gulfport, Mississippi 39501

PREFACE

The overall purpose of the summer school program at the Gulfport East Junior High School was to help the student who had been doing work that was below average to realize a degree of success in the study of language, composition, and literature. It was the conviction of those who planned the course that every child could attain some degree of success if he could be motivated. By permitting him to begin work at his level of learning, he could progress from that level with at least satisfaction. This successful performance would serve to motivate him to greater degrees of success.

Director of the Pilot Study

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I. INTRODUCTION: Statement of the Problem

Secondary English teachers face many difficulties when dealing with students who feel no motivation to improve their language skills, an attitude that is usually either the result of a weak background in reading or of boredom with the standardized curriculum. These problems range from overcrowded classrooms, outdated textbooks, and lack of audio visual materials, to disagreement among teachers and administrators regarding such innovations as homogeneously grouped and non-graded classes. Plans for the 1970 summer school session in Gulfport were based on a consideration of such problems.

In order to justify implementing new techniques in the regular school program, the teachers involved in summer school incorporated various teaching procedures related to individualized, student-oriented instruction. The availability of funds from a Title I project made possible small classes, textbooks which combined the three areas of English into a linguistic program, and supplementary curriculum materials.

II. PROCEDURES

A. Organization

Ginn's Voices I, with supplementary reading in Voices II, was the basic text. Paperback book libraries were available in each classroom, and the students were encouraged to read for book reports, four of which were required, and for leisure reading. Magazines were also available and were utilized frequently in connection with class assignments. Spiral notebooks in which each student kept his assignments, pencils, and bulletin board material were purchased with funds from the project.

Students were grouped by a combination of their spelling and language scores on the Stanford Achievement Test, Form X. Class size varied from ten to twelve. All students except those on the lowest reading level participated in small group sessions at least twice a week, in which they received additional help in problem areas. All students made a selection from the paperback book libraries on Friday and read under the supervision of the reading teachers, giving the English teachers time for planning. The forty-five minute reading period each day was utilized to provide individual attention for the slower students. Others were encouraged to progress in the material at their own rate.

B. Staff Relationships

Teacher selection for this program required that the applicant be willing to deal personally with and to appreciate the difficulties of the low socio-economic student. As always, but perhaps even more significant in classes such as these, teacher enthusiasm and positive attitude were vital factors in student motivation. Contributing to the success of the program was the complete cooperation and approval of the school administration.

Agreement in methods and goals among the teachers involved in the program, which was evident from the conception of the project, was necessary to establish and maintain an effective working atmosphere.

C. Type of Instruction

Because the primary concern of the summer school classes was to insure individualized instruction, activities were geared to provide as much contact between student and teacher on a one-to-one basis as possible. Problems in composition were apparent in the majority of the students'

work, and the greatest level of success was achieved in that area, primarily the result of the teachers' devoting time each day to discussion of the journal entries of each student.

D. Grouping of English Classes

Students were grouped by a combination of their spelling and language scores on the Stanford Achievement Test, Form X. Class size varied from ten to twelve. All students except those on the lowest reading level participated in small group sessions at least twice a week.

E. Grouping of Reading Classes

Students were grouped for reading by the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test and were placed in one of four levels:

Level I -- fourth grade or below - reading classes held four days a week

Level II -- fifth and sixth grades - reading classes held two days a week

Level III -- seventh and eighth grades - reading classes held one day a week

Level IV -- above eighth grade - reading classes held one day a week

Some students did not attend reading classes as their scores indicated they could best spend the time in other areas. All students made a selection from the paperback book libraries on Friday and read under the supervision of the reading teachers, giving the English teacher time for planning.

F. Materials

Ginn's Voices I, with supplementary reading in Voices II, was the basic text. Paperback book libraries were available in each classroom, and the students were encouraged to read for book reports, four of which

were required, and for leisure reading. Magazines were also available and were utilized frequently in connection with class assignments. Spiral notebooks, in which each student kept his assignments, pencils and bulletin board material were purchased with funds obtained from the projects.

G. Activities

Because classes were small and the teachers had a planning period each Friday in which to organize work for the next week, lessons could be planned to provide for individual differences, and varied activities could be offered. Among these activities, which supplemented textbook material, were preparing and alphabetizing card catalog entries for the paperback book libraries, discussion groups led by recent high school graduates on topics of interest to teenagers, panel discussions, exercises on using quotation marks based on comic strip character dialogues, a "rock festival" featuring current hit songs to introduce a lesson on modern poetry, and a staged production of a one-act play. The primary purpose of the slow-learner, or under-achiever, English program was to increase self-confidence and stimulate interest; therefore, much time was spent in developing activities which would aid in the attainment of these objectives.

H. Student Motivation

The opportunity to see some measure of success which the English program provided each student contributed greatly to an improvement in attitude and interest. Another factor aiding this improvement was the removal of the slow or unmotivated student from large classes in which he makes no attempt to participate, and in which the teacher has little

chance to deal with his needs. The students have achieved because they have tried, and they have tried because they have been given an opportunity to pace themselves rather than being confronted daily with with their inability to "keep up" in a regular class.

III. RESULTS OF PROJECT

Results of the summer project indicated that the combination of small classes, material geared to the interests and abilities of the students, and an atmosphere which encouraged participation and individual progress had produced improvement in language skills. In comparison with a control group which received instruction from traditional materials, the pilot group scored several levels higher on Form W of the Stanford Achievement Test. More significant are comments from letters written to the superintendent at the conclusion of the Summer program: "I would like for English to be taught like the way they are teaching in Summer school. They don't give you report cards because they don't believe that grades really accomplish much about what you are really doing in school. English can be taught in so many ways such as: music, reading, and so on. But I like English to taught the way it is now." And "The English we are taking in Summer school is very good. People who are slow in English need it very bad. It helps you to read better and spelling better. This English will help you learn the background of it all. Some kids can not learn some of the rules and other hard things in English so they need help in this way." Based on the results of the X and W forms of the Stanford Achievement Test, the statistics of the thirteen students tested in the <u>control group</u> showed the following results:

<u>Spelling</u>	<u>Language</u>	<u>Overall</u>
0 months	+5.6 months	+2.8 months

The statistics of the random pilot group are as follows:

Spelling	Language	Overall
+ 1 month	+6.5 months	+4.5 months

Reading scores based on comparison of Stanford Achievement Tests showed an overall improvement of 8.5 months.

Although there is not a significant difference in the scores, results are higher in the pilot program, which was not geared to a traditional type test such as the Stanford Achievement. The validity of such an evaluation is limited as a result of the short amount of time available for instruction.

Teachers in the program, Mrs. Barbara Cunningham, Mrs. Marcia Atha, Mrs. Ann Heidleberg, Mrs. Judith Stewart, are agreed that student interest and attitude, and motivation have improved to the extent that most of the students are no longer "reluctant learners".

"Attendance has improved, discipline has not been a problem, and students have more confidence and self-respect," said Mrs. Kay Price, teacher co-ordinator for the program.

Dr. Mercer Miller, Assistant Superintendent of Gulfport City Schools, and director of the program, added, "Students who have always been wrong are realizing success for the first time. Those who were reluctant to answer questions in class are now enthusiastic participants."

W. L. Rigby, Superintendent of Gulfport City Schools, is a strong supporter of the program. He said the experiment was being made because, "Public education is at the corssroads. We have to adapt our methods and procedures to the situation we're in today. If we find that traditional methods of teaching will not get the job done, we have to find new ways and use them."

School officials are planning to use the "new methods" in some regular school classes in September.

The teachers and administration are not the only ones who are enthusiastic about the value of the program. The students themselves were given an opportunity to express their opinions about "new English".

IV. Observations by Students

A. Student Quotes

"The English we are taking in summer school is very good. People who are slow in English need it very bad. It helps you to read better and spelling better. This English will help you learn the background of it all. Some kids cannot learn some of the rules and other hard things in English so they need help in this way."

"I take English and I love to come to school. It doesn't get boring at all because the teachers let you participate in almost everything. The material is also fun to read. Thank you for taking time out to read this letter."

"I would like for English to be taught like the way they are teaching in summer school. They don't give you report cards because they don't believe that grades really accomplish much about what you are really doing in school. English can be taught in so many ways such as: music, reading and so on. But I like English to be taught the way it is now."

"Let this program be as a regular school program, because, not only of this one reason. It's that so many people are writing and I really believe that they are with it all the way. What I mean is they like this type of an English class. It's what we need, I mean this course is different from ordinary English class. Because you have everything

combined, I mean it's no problem to do."

V. Conclusions

A curriculum of this nature should not be instituted unless provisions are made to continue it for several years. A student who begins this program should have the opportunity to improve without being returned to a traditional classroom before he is ready. Such a transfer serves to increase anxiety and the frustration of being unable to participate and achieve.

A. Basic English

1. Organization

Students are selected for Basic English if they have a record of failure or have made low grades which indicate the need for extra help. They are consulted as soon as possible when the assignment is made.

Students may be moved from basic to regular English classes, or from regular to basic, at the end of a six weeks or a semester on the recommendation of the teachers involved. They should not be retained in either curriculum if a change is needed and can be made.

Satisfactory (S) and Unsatisfactory (U) grades are given at the end of each six weeks and each semester. If for some reason a number grade is needed, a satisfactory mark could be derived from a range of 70 to 85 according to the quality of the student's work.

On the high school level Basic English is a three year curriculum which can be selected based on the student's record. He receives regular credit for each course.

2. Recommendations

Students should be grouped at the end of the year for participation in the program the next fall. At this time they should be consulted and informed about the goals of the program.

Classes should be set up to separate those with serious learning problems from those who primarily need motivation.

At the end of a year teachers should submit a written evaluation of each student's progress with recommendations for future grouping.

Classes should never exceed fifteen students.

Students should be screened for physical handicaps so that the teacher will be aware of these problems.

The number of classes offered at each school should depend on the number of students who need the course, rather than what fits into the curriculum.

Each teacher involved in the program should have at least two Basic English classes.

Students should be allowed to move from basic to regular English at the end of a six weeks term without being expected to make up the work or take that section of the semester exam; however, a student should be in one English section at least two consecutive six weeks of a semester.

Teacher selection should be on a volunteer basis, with a full explanation of the program given.

Provisions should be made for pre-school orientation sessions to familiarize teachers with materials and techniques.

Regular recruiting should include an attempt to interest practice teachers and job applicants in Basic English, with visits to classes in session whenever possible.